



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

I'd like to begin this message by applauding all our DEQ employees for their initiative and efforts in responding to an unprecedented natural disaster brought by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, while continuing to meet our environmental regulatory responsibilities.

We continue to work on cleanup and recovery from last fall's storms. We also are revisiting our emergency response actions in response to the 2005 storms to learn what worked well and what areas we need to work on. As we now enter the 2006 hurricane season, we have identified a number of priority actions we should take to be better prepared for this season. Some of the more notable actions underway are:

1. Identification and appropriate training of employees who might be involved with disaster response. This training includes certain National Incident Management System (NIMS) modules, search and rescue training, and hazardous materials training as appropriate. Recent statistics show we have had extraordinary participation in this training.
2. Communication during the emergency response last fall was poor and will be improved for this hurricane season. This applies both to communications hardware as well as communications procedures.
3. We all learned some hard lessons about what the media can do with bad information in the absence of facts. We are in the process of developing a protocol for rapid and accurate environmental sampling, analysis and reporting. Additionally, we are working to design and implement a disaster-specific database that will facilitate analysis and reporting of environmental information.
4. We are also in the process of developing evacuation plans for DEQ's coastal offices. This is to include a call-in procedure to help us assure that all our employees have safely evacuated.
5. We are putting together a pre-strike information gathering plan to determine the locations of large quantities of hazardous materials (e.g. rail and barge) and provide greater safety for our emergency responders.
6. The Office of Management and Finance has been given responsibility to prepare a pre-strike logistics plan for our response efforts. They are also working to be better prepared for administrative issues dealing with FEMA and FEMA funding eligibility.
7. Our Executive Counsel and the Legal Affairs Division have been tasked with reconciling emergency declarations and special waivers and variances issued in the aftermath of the storms of last fall and to begin preparations for this hurricane season.
8. The department's communication staff has been charged with preparing an external communications plan so we can effectively prepare and disseminate important environmental information as it is developed.

As our agency examines its preparedness for the 2006 hurricane season, we encourage everyone to look at your particular circumstances and make sure you and your home are adequately prepared for this hurricane season.

Sincerely,
Mike D. McDaniel, Ph.D.
Secretary,
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

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